

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHNNY TORRENS-SPENCE (U.K.), DEPUTY COMMANDING GENERAL, MNSTC-I SUBJECT: BUILDING CAPABLE IRAQI SECURITY FORCES MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2008

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MR. HOLT: I'd like to welcome Brigadier Johnny Torrens-Spence, from the United Kingdom. He's the deputy commanding general for the Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq.

And Brigadier, welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable, and thanks for joining us, sir.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Jack, hi. It's Johnny Torrens-Spence here. You got it right. I am indeed the deputy commander of MNSTC-I. I've been here for about six months now and I have another six months to run, or thereabouts. And I don't know how you want to play this, but I think perhaps the best way is if I kick off and give you perhaps 20 minutes or so -- no, a bit less than that -- 10 minutes, I think, of my thoughts on how we are, and then leave it over -- pass it back to you and open for questions. How does that look? MR. HOLT: That sounds very good.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Okay. Good. Right, well, welcome, and -- it's really good morning, I think, over there. It's just on 6:00 here.

Now, MNSTC-I stands for Multi-National Security Transition Command Iraq, which is a long -- a long term, a long phrase. But what we actually do is force generation and force sustainment.

We are not directly involved in the combat operations out in the field. Our job is to help the Iraqis grow their military forces and sustain their military forces and develop their military forces. And once grown and developed, in effect what we do is we (pass ?) those forces across to the field commanders and they then conduct operations on behalf of the fight.

So we work intimately with the Iraqi ministries -- that is, the defense ministry and the ministry of interior, principally those two ministries -- to help them generate capability. And we sort of look at our business in four different categories, if you'd like. We call them conditions.

The first one is force generation. That is, the numbers business of actually putting more or enough soldiers, airmen, sailors, and various sorts of policemen out -- equipped and trained -- into the battle space. And I'll return to each of these in turn.

The second one is developing the Iraqi security force capability to operate independently. And the key there is not just the combat force -- i.e., not just the battalions and the police stations, but all the stuff that goes behind that that is normally not so visible that is needed to actually turn a group of battalions into a coherent force. And I'm talking such things as logistics, intelligence, command and control -- those sort of aspects there.

The third element is improving the institutional capability of the Iraqi security forces. This is looking at the ministries themselves, the two key ministries that I deal with, MOI and MOD, and building their institutional capacity to generate the force, sustain the force, direct the force, manage the force.

And the fourth area is continued focus on professionalism and the minimization of sectarian trends and so on in the Iraqi security forces.

Now, as I touch on each of these in turn, the force generation piece has been the focus of our efforts and still really remains the focus of our efforts up to now. And I think we may -- we've been very happy with the way this has gone, in general terms. The force has grown extremely quickly over the last year, and particularly it's grown quickly over the last six months, as the level of violence has dropped back a little bit and has allowed us to concentrate on growing the force.

I mean, just to give you one example, the Iraqi army in January '07 was around about 100,000. And by the end of '08, i.e., in two years' time, it'll be well over 200,000. So it'll have grown by 220- odd percent in two years. I mean, that would be equivalent of the American Army growing from its current 500,000 to well over a million in two years, and that is an enormous rate of growth. And an equivalent rate of growth in the police, as well, I may say, and the navy and the air force.

And much of what we're seeing by way of stresses and strains is purely as a result of that. It's purely the result of the tempo of growth which we're pushing along, although Iraq is helping; we're pushing along together, I suppose you should say. And so I think sometimes I've underestimated the institutional stress that comes from growing a force that size.

Now -- but this is sort of starting to come to an end here now, and I think by the end of 2008 the bulk of the counterinsurgency force, as we call it, will be complete. We will probably no longer be focusing on the business of just putting more brigades and more policemen out there. Of course, we're not completely masters at this. The Iraqis have their own view on this, and that, the Iraqi view, is the predominant view, and if they chose or choose to go on, they can do that.

But I think there's generally an acceptance that the raw growth in the security forces will start to tail off at the back end of this year, and we are already shifting our focus, frankly, and I think from the second half of this year onwards, we'll be focusing more on the second one of those four categories that I talked to; that is, growing the enablers.

And really a big priority now for us is developing the logistic capability, rather than the command and control, and developing the surveillance and target acquisition capability. Those sort of issues which actually provide the coherency to the force and add greater value to its combat capability.

And I'm very happy to talk more about that, because I think that is quite a big issue, really, frankly. The shift in focus from just growing the force into turning into a more coherent force.

The development of the two ministries is really largely a function of the first two issues. That is, the issues that arise when you grow a force and the issues -- arise when you make a force more comprehensive have to be dealt with by the ministries. And the practice and the experience of dealing with those issues drives institutional improvement in the ministries. Just to give you one example, they now -- (inaudible) -- the Iraqi military is having to maintain their tens of thousands of vehicles. There's a huge logistic burden to that in terms of fuel, in terms of spare parts, in terms of training mechanics, training drivers. All of that has to be planned and managed by the ministry of defense. And the management and planning of that develops their institutional capacity.

We're increasingly confident, frankly, about their ability to do this. Their budgeting is improving fast. Their strategic planning capability is also improving fast, and there are growing signs that both ministries are turning into functional -- functioning institutions.

Finally, the professionalism piece. This is a long-term exercise. Everybody understands this. This is -- you know, this is not something which you can snap your fingers and resolve. We're talking generations of effort here.

But I think as the worst of the sectarian violence in the country has declined, we have seen an -- increasing signs of improvements in professionalism and reductions in sectarianism in the ministries. In fact, I think in some ways the ministry -- particularly the ministry of defense is leading the charge in this area, frankly. We now have -- increasing coherent inspector general and internal procedures and regimes to manage aspects of non-professional behavior and we're starting to see the first signs of prosecutions, internal prosecutions within the MOD and particularly within the MOI resulting from that.

So the common theme to all of that is a sort of measured transition of authority, a measured transition of responsibility from the coalition to the Iraqis. And the sort of stages we try and look at are -- stage one is we do it; stage two is we do it and they watch; stage three is we do it together; stage four is they do it and we watch; and then stage five is they do it.

And of course, different areas, different functions were moving at different speeds down that glide path, but I think in general we're fairly confident that we are moving down that glide path in a measured way.

And the other point I'd just make on this is the aspect of money. Of course, this is an expensive business, building and sustaining a large security force like we have now. But I'd just like to make two points, really.

The Iraqis are now spending more money than we are. As you would imagine, there's a myriad ways of counting this, but in general terms now, if you look at equipping, for instance, they're spending maybe three or four times more money than we are on a sort of daily basis. There are different ways of counting it, but that trend is continuing. The Iraqi spend is continuing to rise, and the coalition spend is continuing to fall.

We are having to be increasingly judicious about where we spend our money, but it is -- nevertheless remains the case that our ability to spend coalition money remains critical to the success of this mission. Because we are able to apply this money where it has quick and immediate effect to accelerate Iraqi growth where it's needed to provide the maximum value for us and for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi police as well, and to push selected aspects of their capability down that glide path that I've already described more quickly than it would otherwise be the case. So the money is valuable; we need to continue to use it, use it wisely, and I think it's fair to say over time less of it will be required.

So that's probably all I want to say at this stage. I'll just now -- (inaudible) -- throw it open to the floor.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Andrea, you were first on line, so why don't you get us started?

Q Yes, sir. I have two questions (for him?). The first, Major General Hertling mentioned that to secure gains in Mosul probably 1,000 police forces would need to be trained within the next year. I was wondering how that effort was progressing.

And then second, I've read there are three simultaneous operations in Basra, Mosul, and Sadr City. And I was wondering aside from the general force generation piece, what MNSTC-I effort was most responsible for success in these operations?

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Okay. Thank you, yeah. We're trying to grow the police in a lot of places, frankly, not just up in the north, though clearly the north has been a priority for us. The north was a little bit behind, actually, in terms of growth of the police force last year, and we have been prioritizing, as General Hertling said, growth in the Iraqi police in the north.

But across the board, we're remaining -- we're still growing the Iraqi police pretty quickly. It's done, as you would understand, province by province, and each province has got a different problem. Each province has a different number of policemen to start with, and it depends on the density of population, the size of the province, and the scale of the security problem which they're dealing with.

But in fact, we are managing a considerable enhancement for police across the board. And the northern provinces certainly are there. Baghdad remains a priority as far as police growth is concerned. We're focusing quite heavily still on Baghdad.

Anbar also is an area of priority as far as police growth is concerned because of the thinning out of the coalition force there, particularly, and to some extent also, I may say, thinning out of the Iraqi army in Anbar in order to concentrate forces elsewhere. So we're looking to back-fill that to some extent, by police, and the security situation in Anbar I think pretty much -- you know, nothing is perfect in this world, but pretty much allows us to do that.

As far as the three operations, the three concurrent operations are concerned, that is principally a matter for the corps -- that is, MNCI, the Multi-National Corps Iraq -- rather than us. Largely, I think that it was the -

- and actually, to be honest, largely a matter for the Iraqi ministry of defense and ministry of the interior, too, about how they deployed their forces and conducted their forces in conjunction with the corps for those three operations.

I think it's fair to say, though, that those three operations, three concurrent operations -- pretty well concurrent -- would not have been possible even six months ago. And it has been the creation of the substantial numbers of combat forces, particularly, in this case, Iraqi army. The scale of the increase in the Iraqi army, which has allowed the Iraqi ministry of defense, in conjunction with the coalition forces, to maneuver forces around and concentrate forces where they're most needed.

One of the issues which has bugged us in the past, and everybody'd be well aware of this, is that we would clear an area, but then we didn't have enough forces to hold that area when we moved on to somewhere else. And we would thin out in that area, and the problem would grow again behind us.

And now, thank goodness, we have, I think -- I hope -- sufficient force density in the country that we can clear an area and hold it. And if you look at what's going on, particularly in Basra now, you will see that is exactly what is happening. It is very much a holding operation now to sustain the gains that we've made.

That also is starting to come through in Mosul. I think probably Sadr City is not quite there yet. We're still in the first phase of that, but there's no doubt that as we get to the end of the clearance operation, is that the holding piece, the sustaining the effort that really counts. And then focusing on new challenges and keeping the opposition -- you know, keep them on the back foot. Don't let them settle; don't let them rebuild their infrastructure and their networks. Keep on chasing, chasing, chasing. And it's the sheer number of soldiers we've got now, and policemen, that allows us to do that.

That helpful?

Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And DJ.

Q Hey, it's DJ Elliott at the Long War Journal.

I was wondering about the four corps that are supposed to be formed for the Iraqi army. Is there any details for their structure or how they're going to be set up?

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: No, sir, there really isn't. There've been some very -- how would I describe it -- there has been some very preliminary thoughts about that within the ministry of defense. There has not been, I think, any formal structured policymaking about turning the current divisional structure into a corps structure. You will be aware that they do have -- not a complete coverage, but now many of the hotter areas in the country have got these operational command centers. There's one in Basra, there's one in Mosul, there's one Diyala, there's one in Baghdad, of course. There's -- we're just about to stand up one in Anbar.

These are operational command centers run by the military to command the security operation in that region. There is a sort of notional idea that at

some stage in the future some of these might morph into corps headquarters. But really, nothing has happened in that regard yet, because I think as far as Iraq is concerned, the corps structure really relates to some future time when they start to look at their military in a more conventional, national defense posture.

They're currently committed in a exclusively counterinsurgency posture, and we support that, I may say. But I think when they start to think about their military as a national defense capability, conventional capability, that you will see a little more of this.

We're starting to get indications of them looking at national defense from an equipment point of view, planning out ahead, looking out maybe 10 years or so to where they would like to be in an equipment and materiel sense, starting to line up their ducks actually quite well, really, to put together an integrated plan for modernizing their force in the future. Hasn't materialized yet. And I think as they start down that path, they may decide to reconfigure themselves in a more conventional corps-based structure.

But I -- frankly, there has been no substantive moves in that direction thus far.

MR. HOLT: All right. And Andrew.

Q Yes, General, Good afternoon. Andrew Lubin from the Military Observer. Appreciate the time you spend with us, sir.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Hello, sir. How are you?

Q Good, thank you.

Sir, a lot of the -- the question nowadays of the courage of the Iraqi army is not in question, but logistics is.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Yes.

Q Too often we hear stories about they're running out of the basics -- food, fuel, bullets, and water. Can you talk to us about how this is being addressed? Because this seems to happen time and time again.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Yeah, it does happen quite a bit. And there are -- you won't be surprised to know that this is -- there are many aspects to this problem. Some of them are, frankly, little more than what you get in my army and possibly even in yours, the bloke at the front complains about the bloke behind. (Chuckles.) You know, that he's not getting all the service that he thinks he should. But I wouldn't like to trivialize this. There are substantial issues in the logistic area.

We are now well underway with building a model, a logistic model which will support this army. And it's a very simple model and I think it suits the needs of a counterinsurgency force really rather well.

As you know, there are 13 divisions in the Iraqi army, and we are currently in the process of setting up 13 -- they're called location commands. That is an Iraqi term. They chose to call them location commands. But actually, what they really are are divisional (log ?) bases. And they have an - - each one of those sits somewhere central in the Iraqi divisional area and

happens -- most of them are actually co-located with a divisional training area alongside. And they have the full panoply of logistic functions inside them. They've got a transportation capability; they've got a storage and depot capability; they've got a maintenance capability; they've got a medical capability, and so on. And that will be the logistic hub for that division, if you like. And the individual brigades in that division of battalions will (suck ?) on that for their logistic support.

Now, there are a total of 13 of those, as I said. Nine of them already exist in one form or another. They're either left over from the old structure of general support units or they existed before the war, and we are beefing up those nine. We are reinforcing them and enhancing them, I think is the best term.

Four don't exist, and we are building four from scratch. By the end of this year all 13 will be stood up, at least in an infrastructure sense. That is, they will be in existence. Now, of course, there's more to this than just building them. They have to be manned and equipped and the individuals in them have to be trained.

And we are working with our Iraqi colleagues hard on that. We have a whole clutch of specialist logistic courses running at our principal logistic base in Taji, trying to create the maintainers, the logisticians, the medics, the cooks. You name it; we're running courses there.

Now, this again is slow, because it has to be incremental stuff. You know, you can train a low-level maintainer or a low-level cook comparatively easy, but to train a master chef takes years of work. And so this will be incremental improvement over time, there's no doubt about that. But I think the Iraqis pretty much understand that.

Now, stepping back one stage from that through a national level, we're going to have a single hub, logistic hub for the whole -- at a national level. And that will be at Taji, where I just mentioned, about 20 kilometers northwest of where I am now in the middle of Baghdad.

It's in fact the old Iraqi army logistic base which we have spent a very considerable amount of money -- most American money, coalition money -- to refurbish and reestablish. And that, again, will really mirror, to a large extent, the facilities available at the location commands, and obviously at a third- and fourth-line level, more substantial for depot operations.

And in fact, just yesterday, the first element of the national maintenance depot at Taji was opened, which was the small arms repair facility. That was a big show yesterday, opened by the Iraqi national security adviser.

And following on from that to the rest of this year, you will get near weekly, or perhaps monthly opening of various maintenance and logistic facilities in Taji. There's a tank -- a heavy track maintenance facility, there's a Humvee maintenance facility, there's a light-wheeled vehicles maintenance facility, there's a generator maintenance facility. And then on the depot side, there's warehousing for class two, class nine, and all of that. There's a big reception and staging area for spare parts coming in, and so on.

And all of this, the Taji hub plus the location commands, have to be held together by a network so that individuals can demand spares and distribution can go -- a network in which to manage the logistic (problems ?).

We recognize that. There are some rudimentary networks out there right now, but they need to be integrated better than they are. They need to be expanded considerably, and that's the biggest problem. There's a considerable number of Iraqis need to be trained to manage and use that.

Now, we're working on all of that, and as I said, the infrastructure will pretty much be in place, I think, by the end of the year. And so I think it's reasonable to expect a coherent capability in the spring of next year or something like that. I'm not saying that this is going to solve the problems overnight. There will still be issues, but I think that's a fairly robust and appropriate structure for them.

I would just touch on one other thing. Ammunition -- there's a separate ammunition depot up at Beijit, which is about 100 miles north of here that's completely independent from the maintenance depot at Taji. It's right out in the middle of nowhere where it probably needs to be. But that is also going to be integrated into the same basic infrastructure.

And in fact we're in the process right now of handing over the responsibility of Beijit ammunition depot from the coalition to the Iraqis. That's going to happen over the next months, and by the end of July we will be in a position where the Iraqis are running Beijit just with some modest oversight and mentoring from our people.

That help?

Q Yes, very much. Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Somebody else has joined us.

Q Jarred Fishman's on.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred. (Cross talk.)

Q Thank you for your service to the cause.

Could you talk a little bit about -- it seems we've had our most strategic victories in Basra, Sadr City, hopefully soon to be in Mosul. Can you talk a little bit about how that is affecting the Iraqis that you work with in the army and in all parts of the security forces?

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Yeah. I think this has been very significant, actually. And -- I mean, I'm not a combat guy, so I'm not able to talk with any great authority about the actual combat operations in Basra and Mosul and Baghdad.

But I do see in the ministries -- in particular in the ministries I see a new sense of confidence, a bit of a spring in the step and a sense that we can do this for ourselves. And a new willingness, if you like, to take the lead, to take responsibility for issues and manage it in the way that we want, not necessarily in the way that the coalition wants.

Now, that's some ways a little bit uncomfortable for some people, and some -- it certainly makes for a, in some cases, a more messy relationship, because we're not in the driving seat as much as we were. But that is progress, actually, and that is exactly the way we want to go.

So we welcome this, really, and I do think that the relationship is changing somewhat. We are more advisory, more in a monitoring and a mentoring role, and less in the driving seat, if you like. And I think that's the way to go, frankly.

I have to say I don't think that this means that we can or should disengage. There remains a very important role to be played here. They're inexperienced in the ministries; they don't have the background, the training, the technical expertise needed really yet to do all of this for themselves.

So our advice and our assistance still remain very important to them. In fact, I think there's a very strong linkage between those parts of the Iraqi security force and those missions of the Iraqi security force -- and I don't only mean operational missions; I mean all missions -- with which we engage actively with them, in partnership or in mentoring and advisory roles, and success in those missions.

If we back off completely and don't help them, don't engage with them, the chances of failure go up very significantly. The best operations are those where we get alongside them, we discuss what they want to do and the way they want to do it, and then give our advice to them on how that -- perhaps a little nudge or -- nudging it this way or that way, or here's another way of looking at the problem, but not necessarily driving our solution to the problem.

Because this is their military, their own procedures, and we work best for both parties, frankly, if we work with the grain of their society and the grain of their military culture.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir. And just -- we've got another minute or two left here, but if we have any --

(Cross talk.)

Q Yeah, I do. General, Andrew Lubin again. Can you talk to us a bit about the corruption issue? For a while, when -- especially logistics, you had stuff come in the front door and run out the back door. Are these problems still going on, or have they been solved?

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: No, no, no. I think "solved" would be an overly optimistic word. But I think they are -- they have been reduced, contained, certainly. I mean, corruption's endemic in this part of the world. And it's -- that is not something which is going to be solved, frankly, in that sort of black-and-white sense.

But I think that a number of things have been done which help this considerably. I think actually the foreign military sales program has been a considerable success in this regard, because the foreign military sales, although not always popular over here, because it tends to be expensive and it tends to (be a little bit slow ?). But on the other hand, it is obviously transparent and obviously corruption-free, and it has been, in the past particularly, when the ministries were starting up, it was a very useful mechanism for them to acquire materiel and equipment in a demonstrably corruption-free environment.

Now, they're now starting to spread their wings, and we are encouraging this, frankly. I mean, we don't want them to be totally dependent on the United

States FMS process for acquiring equipment, nor should they be. Nobody else is; why should they?

They will buy from where they can get best value for money, commensurate with their national requirements and strategic, you know, (exceptions ?). Some things, I'm sure, will continue to go through FMS; other things will not.

Now, if they move out from FMS, though, and start to procure directly from the rest of the world, the issue of corruption undoubtedly -- the question will reappear. And they are conscious of that and they are putting in quite a bit of effort to build in procurement procedures to minimize the threat of that.

And when I was dealing with one this morning, they've just set up a new prime ministerial committee chaired by the prime minister with the attendance of the ministers of finance, interior, and defense, the national security adviser, in effect, to vet the procurement strategies of major defense and security acquisitions.

So that people can be confident that the strategies, the suppliers, and the -- budgeting of those major defense contracts have been endorsed and vetted at the highest level and across several ministries so -- of course, in the Iraqi context, across several political parties and so on and so forth.

So that's just one example of how they're trying to get to grips with this. This is not going to be it in terms of solving the problem, but I think they recognize it. And it's interesting that accusations of corruption are politically damaging to individuals here. It's a good sign, that. It's a sign that there is -- it's a sign of a nation's democracy, I would say, when individual politicians, individual ministers, are concerned about their reputation. And they surely are now.

They're all very well aware that the election's not that far away, and that their reputation for clean dealing will be an asset in electoral terms. And I think they're trying to position themselves as far as possible to reflect that.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir. Thank you very much, and we appreciate you being with us here today for the Bloggers Roundtable. Brigadier Johnny Torrens-Spence of the United Kingdom, and he's the deputy commanding general for Multi-National Security Transition Command- Iraq.

Thank you very much for joining us today, sir.

GEN. TORRENS-SPENCE: Hey, it's been my pleasure. My pleasure. Anytime. Thanks a lot, gentlemen. Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Hopefully, we can speak again.

END.